

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

WHAT HE COST HER.

BY JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASHINGBERD," "AT HER MERCY,"
"HALVES," &c.

CHAPTER VI. A SPARRING MATCH.

COLONEL GERALD JUXON and his niece both remained in the porch of their pretty cottage, while Landon walked down the drive and out of the gate; the colonel because he deemed it expedient to see "that fellow" off the premises with his own eyes; the lady because she wished to see the last of that gallant and very good-looking young knight, who had fought, and might have fallen, or at least come to very serious grief, for her sake. He turned at the last moment and raised his cap; the colonel mechanically replied to the salute with his forefinger; the young lady bowed and waved her hand, but by no means mechanically.

"Well, upon my soul!" cried the colonel, throwing up his open palms. It was for him a very slight expression of astonishment and annoyance, and when excited he generally doubled his fists.

"What's the matter, Uncle Gerald?" inquired his niece, coolly.

"Matter, begad? Well, I think it matter enough, when a young woman of two-and-twenty goes and throws herself at the head of a penniless scamp like that——"

"How do you know Mr. Landon is a scamp, uncle?" inquired Ella, in a tone rather of amusement than indignation.

It is Coleridge, I think, who says that no one can have a firm conviction, who cannot afford to laugh at it himself; and this was Ella's case. She felt in her heart of hearts that Landon was no scamp.

"How do I know it? Why, because everybody knows every cadet is a scamp. As to means and marriage, they may have their hands to offer, but there is never a coin in them to pay the parson for performing the service."

"Still they have their honour, and their good swords," observed Ella, gravely.

"Their honour!" shrieked the little colonel; "ye gods, think of a cadet's honour! and as to their swords, they don't happen to wear them."

Ella broke into a long musical laugh, which seemed to disconcert her uncle extremely.

"I know, my dear girl," said he, in what was for him a tone of conciliation, "that you are as obstinate as the gout in one's heel, but it is quite useless even for you to set your heart upon that young vagabond. You might just as well fall in love with a drummer boy—you might, indeed!"

"Well, and why not, uncle? Then I could be vivandière to the regiment."

"That would be a dashed pretty thing," answered the other, scornfully.

"Well, I think I *should* look rather pretty in uniform," said Ella, with an air of reflection. "With a cap with a gold band, and a charming little keg of spirits, instead of a sabretache. Then, if Mr. Landon was wounded—as he would be sure to be in the first engagement, for he is as brave as a lion—I would give him a little glass of brandy, so;" and she turned her little hand bewitchingly in the air, in illustration of this piece of ambulance practice.

"It is deuced hard to be angry with you, Ella," ejaculated the colonel; "but this is a serious matter. You have given

such encouragement to this young cat-a-mountain, that I will lay five to one his conceit will lead him to come back again."

"I would lay ten to one, uncle," replied the young lady, coolly, "that his good feeling will cause him to do so—ten pairs of gloves to one odd one, that Mr. Landon will come back. I intend him to do so. I mean to see him when he does come."

"The devil you do! then I'll keep a dog warranted to fly at beggars."

"Mr. Landon is not a beggar, nor a poor man at all, uncle," answered the girl, steadily. "It would make no difference to me if he has not a penny; but, as a matter of fact, he is the only son of a rich merchant; for he told me so himself."

"I should like to have some better authority for that fact than his bare word," answered the colonel, contemptuously. "However," added he, more gravely, "if you are fixed upon this folly, I will make inquiries. You are resolved, I suppose, to behave as your own mistress in this, as in other matters."

"Most certainly I am," returned the young lady, coolly. They had passed into the drawing-room by this time; Ella was sitting on a low chair with her torn bonnet upon her knees, and her splendid hair falling in dark masses about her shoulders; the colonel was pacing the room with measured strides, that seemed to ill accord with the vehemence and irregularity of his talk.

"Of course, the whole thing may come to nothing, Ella; you can't compel this young gentleman—to make you an offer; for that is what I suppose you are driving at."

Here he stopped, for she had suddenly risen and confronted him with a burning face.

"Look you, uncle," said she, "there are some things I will not put up with even from you. The facts of the case are these: this gentleman, as he truly is, whatever you may choose to call him, has done me to-day, for nothing, as great a service as I have ever experienced from anyone for value received. The only payment he has got is a string of insults from the man whose duty it was to thank him for his generous behaviour. It angered me to see him so treated, as it would have done had he been as old as yourself, and as ill-favoured; and I strove to undo the effect of your discourtesy. That is all."

"Well, well, it may be so, Ella," replied the colonel, his wrath appearing to pale before her own like a fire under the rays of

the sun; "but I know a girl's heart is as tinder to flint when any chance service is done her by any good-looking young fellow; and I wished to put a stop to what I thought, and still think, to be a dashed imprudent thing. You have thanked the lad, and there's an end; but, of course, if you think proper more should come of it—"

"You are cruel and unkind, uncle," interrupted the girl, with vehemence. "Your words are unjust and unjustifiable, and you know it, and I know why you use them. Yes, since you are so hard, I will be hard, too; you want to keep me and my money all to yourself. You have grudged my making any friend, except Gracie, beyond these doors, for fear I should be enticed away from you; and this conduct of yours is all of a piece with the rest of it."

Strange as a likeness would seem between a tall finely-shaped girl, as dark as a gipsy, with a gray and withered anatomy of a man, it could be seen now, as she stood face to face with her uncle, her eyes flashing, and one little foot fiercely beating the floor. The colonel fairly exploded in a sort of "bouquet" of fiery imprecations, ere he found articulate speech.

"You ungrateful minx!" cried he, "is this the reward I get for making my house your home? When you left your father's house in disgrace, I knew it was useless to expect dutifulness, but I did look for some gratitude, girl!"

"And you found it, uncle," answered she, coolly. "I assure you there was that item in addition to the four hundred pounds a-year that I agreed to pay you for my maintenance. I am obliged to you for the shelter you have afforded me, but the price I pay for it is sufficient. I will not put up with insulting insinuations such as you have just thought fit to indulge in. I had rather leave Hawthorne Lodge, and take up my quarters with Gracie, whose mother, I know, would give me welcome."

It was a very remarkable and, indeed, unparalleled circumstance that, notwithstanding the argument was still hot, and the colonel, undoubtedly, still angry, he here forbore to indulge in very strong language.

"I can't think you will be such a born fool as that, Ella," said he, quietly. "To separate yourself from the only relative, save one, you possess in the world would, in your position, be madness. You would

find the commissary's quarters a bad exchange for Hawthorne Lodge, I reckon."

"They would be found capable of improvement, I have no doubt," answered Ella, coolly. "However, as you have stated with such candour, it is not my interest to quarrel with you; and, indeed, uncle, I have no intention of doing anything of the sort. I think I have shown that since we have lived together. You have a temper like the rest of our family, and I make every allowance for it. And, now, with your permission, I will retire to take off these rags and dress for dinner."

She withdrew with a sweeping courtesy, which would have shown offended pride, but for the good-natured nod of the head which accompanied it.

"Did you ever see such an abominably impudent minx?" inquired the colonel, addressing her vacant chair. "Is such conduct credible in a Christian country?"

As the chair was an ordinary chair, and not a spirit-medium—as that article of furniture sometimes is—it did not so much as lift a foot in reply.

In the absence of its negative testimony the colonel was compelled, therefore, to believe the evidence of his own eyes, which he proceeded to objugate accordingly. Then, pulling out his watch, "It wants an hour yet to dinner," said he, "so I'll just step down to the commissary's, and ask him what he thinks about it."

CHAPTER VII. MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

ACTING-DEPUTY-ASSISTANT-COMMISSARY-GENERAL RAY occupied apartments in barracks, which were not more numerous, and much less magnificent than his titles. They were shabbily furnished, and the furniture, even in its best days, had not been good. The look-out of the principal rooms was upon the dusty barrack square; and the quiet of home-life was apt to be disturbed by the sudden roll of drums, the unexpected squeak of fifes, and, occasionally, by the quarrels of the soldiers at the canteen. The seamy side of military life was, in short, always presented to the inmates of this establishment; they lived, as it were, inside the Punch's show. Fortunately—since their quarters were so limited—the family was small; consisting only of the commissary, his wife—a confirmed invalid, whom creeping paralysis at present permitted to move herself about in a patent wheel-chair, but to whom even that limited freedom of movement was soon to be denied—and their daughter,

Grace, whose acquaintance we have already made.

The trio exhibited a marked contrast to one another. The head of the house was a tall, muscular Scotchman, of about sixty years of age, who bore his years, not, indeed, "lightly—like a flower"—but with that comparative convenience which comes of a strong digestion, and absence of fine feelings. He had been a good deal knocked about in his time, but he was harder than the things, or people, that had hit him; he boasted, indeed, of being as "hard as nails," imagining that to be, in a man, a moral excellence, which, in the rhinoceros, he would have only admitted to be an accident of birth. He had at no time of his life been young; that is, he had neither felt himself to be so, nor looked like it; and hence he reaped the great advantage of not perceiving any particular change in himself, nor having it observed by others, now he was old. Everybody who saw him now, and had known him in past days, remarked that Sandy Ray looked much the same. In the cold of Canada he had not shivered; in the heat of the West Indies he had not perspired; but had defied all climates and all weathers. He had never given way to a folly or a weakness; never experienced the temptation of an impulse of any sort; and hence, upon a very small stock of intelligence, had acquired the reputation of a long-headed fellow. He was also reputed to be wealthy, notwithstanding—or, perhaps, in consequence of—the poverty of his domestic ménage. He had held various semi-military appointments all over the world; and though the "pickings" contingent to such positions are not large, there are pickings, and Sandy Ray was supposed to have swept them all up into a very close-meshed net. His christian-name was Alexander, but no one had ever abbreviated that; he was not a man to have his name shortened through affection or familiarity; he was called Sandy from the tint of his hair, whereon the red bristles still contended with the gray for every inch of pate. His features were large and inexpressive, except of hardness; his gray eyes cold and slow of movement; his teeth white and strong as a wolf's. He spoke with an elaborate caution, which was never so marked as when in conversation with his fidus Achates, Colonel Juxon; whose words flowed like a torrent set with crags and rocks, and creamed with imprecations in place of foam.

What bond of union existed between these two men, in most respects so different, it was hard to tell. They had both of them "frugal minds," and it was by some suggested they had private investments in common; others, however, of a livelier fancy, did not hesitate to express their conviction that "Swearing Juxon," and "Sandy Ray," who it was notorious had known one another years ago, in outlandish quarters, shared the knowledge of some secret crime between them, which had probably filled both their pockets.

What was a much greater mystery than how the commissary had secured the colonel's friendship, was, how he had won his wife. She must have been, when he married her, a beautiful girl; indeed, the remnants of great beauty still lingered about her feeble and shattered frame, and "What could she ever have seen in her husband?" was the inquiry every woman put to herself when she saw the pair together. That Mrs. Ray had not married Sandy for his beauty was certain, from the evidence of his contemporaries; nor was it for his mental or moral attractions, because he had none; nor was it for money, since whatever private store he might now possess he had certainly not acquired in those days; it remained, therefore, since all reasonable causes were thus eliminated, that she had married him for love, which was the most extraordinary explanation of all.

It is my private belief that the unhappy lady, being of a nervous and submissive nature, had been positively frightened into wedding him, by which means, perhaps, more marriages are to be accounted for than is generally supposed. However, she was married to him, and was being only slowly relieved from that position by the disease which I have mentioned. Her husband was not specially unkind to her, but of gentleness he had not a grain in his composition, and the lack of it—though the doctors did not say so—had helped to bring her to her present pass. He had, it is probable, been proud of her in his way, at one time; had doubtless smiled grimly when it had come to his ears that people said, "What could she have seen in him?" But now he was only proud of the chair in which she sat. It had cost him, being a patent article, a considerable figure; and when folks said (for there are folks who will say anything) that his wife's affliction must be a great trial to him, he would

reply, "and not only a trial, but, let me tell you, a matter of very considerable expense." Then he would point out the advantages of the chair, with her in it; indeed she was made to put it through its paces as it were, moving it hither and thither with a touch of her thin hand; and if a compliment were not paid him—though he professed to despise compliments—upon the consideration for her comfort that had caused him to invest in so expensive an article, he was more bearish than usual for the rest of the day.

What thoughts passed through poor Mrs. Ray's mind as she sat, dying so slowly in that delicate and costly piece of furniture, are too sad for me to imagine. She was not what is called "a great thinker," so let us hope things were better with her than they would have been with some who are; but sometimes in that worn and weary face could be read terrible things; across those still tender eyes flitted, I fear, the ghosts of youth and health, the piteous remembrance of long vanished joys. She had no very earnest religious feelings, and was therefore without that hope which sustains so many unfortunates in this inexplicable world; of life, the poor soul had had enough; the best that she looked forward to was eternal rest. Yet no word of complaint escaped her. How strange it is that the fate of martyrs, who do not happen to be saints, should attract so little pity!

Gracie, indeed, was sorry for her mother; but with that exception, no one seemed to consider her case a hard one. Perhaps, if she had mentioned how hard she felt it, people might have agreed with her, but as it was, they saw her pale face lit with its sad smile, and expressed their approval of her resignation. She had not much liking for books, but was never idle, working with her needle a little for herself, and a great deal for Gracie. Perhaps the most pressing sorrow she had was the reflection that there would soon come a time when she should still be alive, and yet unable to work; when the palsy that at present had only reached her lower limbs should attack her diligent fingers. Then, indeed, it would be melancholy to sit at that barrack window with folded hands, awaiting death's tardy stroke. The cares of managing the little household upon the scanty sum that her husband allowed for its maintenance, were, it was true, delegated to Gracie, but she shared the responsibility with her, and took all the

blame—and there was often blame—upon her own shoulders. The commissary, who grudged every shilling, however necessarily spent, preferred to find fault with his wife instead of his daughter, because it made the latter cry. Not that he would have been rendered the least uncomfortable by any amount of woman's tears, but because the crying made Gracie's eyes red, and deteriorated from her personal appearance; and her beauty was precious to him, as likely to prove a marketable commodity. Thus the girl escaped a good many jobations, which she did not indeed deserve any more than her mother, but which she would have gladly borne in her mother's place. The invalid on the contrary was well satisfied that any consideration, no matter what, should preserve her beloved daughter from the commissary's ire.

Imagine, therefore, her distress of mind when Gracie made her appearance out of the fly upon that day of the battle of Charlton Fair, with draggled raiment and torn bonnet. In this case Mrs. Ray felt that the dear child must bear her own burden of reproach and fault-finding. And heavy enough she knew it would be; for Gracie had worn her best attire upon the occasion of that unlucky walk with Ella Mayne, and it would take many shillings to repair its damages.

"My dear child," cried she, as soon as she had assured herself that she had received no personal hurt, "what will your father say? It was only last week that he paid three pounds on account to Miss Furbelow."

Her head shook from side to side with nervous agitation; it was terrible to see such affliction, about so insignificant a matter, in one so stricken.

"But, dear mamma, papa will understand that it could not be helped. If it had not been for Mr.—that is, for two young gentlemen from the College—matters might have been much worse."

Mrs. Ray gave a little sigh. She had applied that argument—or had had it applied for her—of comparative degrees of evil, much too often to derive comfort from it. Another philosophic remark that "when things are at their worst they must needs mend," was also inefficacious in her case. Perhaps it was because her powers of perception were dull.

"Change your dress as soon as you can, Gracie, dear, and then tell me all about it.

If your papa comes in, and sees you in such a state, oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!" and again she wrung her hands. There was a similitude in the poor lady's speech and action to those of Mr. Punch, when in dread expectation of the policeman, but "the pity of it" prevented the smile that they would have otherwise provoked. Her policeman was a reality, and she, alas! had no stick wherewith to knock him over the head, to the enjoyment of all beholders.

When Gracie, however, presently reappeared in a dress, less splendid indeed than that which had met with such mischance, but very neat and becoming, it was plain that there was some happiness for the invalid yet. Her daughter looked so blooming that she persuaded herself, "dear Alexander," would not "have the heart" to scold her, and having laid that flattering unction to her soul, she was at liberty to take pride and pleasure in the girl's beauty. In telling her story, Gracie had this difficulty; she had to be careful not to alarm her mother by the account of her own peril, and at the same time not to underrate the services of Mr. Darall, who seemed to her a Paladin. Mrs. Ray listened to his exploits with the attention that the crippled always pay to the recital of any physical conflict. "He must be a very brave and kindhearted young man, that Mr. Darall," said she, when it was concluded, "and his friend also."

"Yes, mamma, he was most kind. It was not his fault that he didn't see us home, as the other did; but it appears that he runs great risk of getting into trouble for having been at the fair at all."

"But does not his friend run the same risk?"

"Well, no; or, at least, if he did it does not signify, because he is very rich; if he was sent away from the Academy to-morrow it would make no difference to his prospects, it seems, while poor Mr. Darall is—poor."

Mrs. Ray sighed again: perhaps she had permitted herself to entertain the "low beginnings" of a romance for Gracie, and now they were ruthlessly trodden down. Gracie understood the sigh quite well; there was no concealment in that household as regarded such matters. She had been told a dozen times by her father that her future prospects in life were in her own hands; that is, that they lay in her making a good marriage; and they had been discussed without reserve. She was

no flirt, nor even what is called "forward," either in ideas or behaviour; yet, perhaps, no man had ever paid her any marked attention without her having reflected to herself, "Perhaps this person will be my husband." It was not her fault that it was so; extreme delicacy of mind was as impossible to one in her circumstances, as modesty is to the offspring of some agricultural labourer, who has but one room for the accommodation of his grown-up family. What was possible to her of good the girl had acquired or retained; she possessed all its solidities, if circumstances had denied to her those graces which embellish goodness. A dissenting chapel may not have the external attractions of a cathedral, simply from want of funds, and yet be equally sacred. Up to that time, for example, Gracie had regarded the marriage question from a point of view that was, for one of her years and sex, somewhat calculating and matter-of-fact. It was, unhappily, no longer possible for her to do so, now that she had seen Hugh Darall.

For the future something would have to be given up as well as acquired; and that something, for the present, seemed immeasurably precious, not willingly to be bartered for much gold.

"What was he like—this Mr. Darall—Gracie?" continued the invalid, with gentle sadness, but with a touch of curiosity, too. Even when a pretty thing is not to be got, one likes to hear all about it.

"Oh, so handsome, dear mamma, and so kind, and I am sure so good!"

Mrs. Ray's pale lips twitched with a painful smile—an accident of her infirmity, perhaps; or was she thinking of some far back time, when she had given some one credit for being "good" upon too short an acquaintance.

"That does not give one a very distinct idea of him, Gracie. Is he dark or fair?"

"Oh, fair mamma. He has blue eyes."

"Like Captain Walters?" inquired the old lady, with affected indifference.

"Oh, not at all like Captain Walters," answered the girl, in a tone of indignation. They are beautiful eyes, very frank, and——"

"Tender," suggested the invalid, smiling.

"Yes, that is the word—tender," answered the girl, simply. "I don't think Mr. Darall would hurt a fly; and yet, when one saw him waiting to meet those wicked men, they looked hard and shining, like drawn swords."

"Do you mean the men did?"

"No, no; his eyes. There were a hundred of them—I mean of the men, of course—and yet he was not one bit afraid; nor would he have been, it is my belief, if they had been a thousand."

"I should like to have seen Mr. Darall, if it were but to thank him for what he did for you, Gracie," said her mother, after a pause; "but I suppose I never shall. They say all is for the best, and perhaps that is. I don't think your papa would like it, you see, since nothing can possibly come of it after all. Don't cry, Gracie; don't cry, my darling!" and, with a dexterous movement of her chair, she brought it close to where Gracie sat at the window. The mother and child embraced without a word. Speech was unnecessary; each knew what the other would have said, and the hopelessness of saying it.

"See, there is Colonel Juxon coming across the square to have a chat with your father," said Mrs. Ray, presently, in her cheerfulest tone. "I wonder what brings him so much earlier than usual!"

"He is come to talk about Mr. Landon and Ella," said Gracie, simply.

"Oh, dear, dear! I hope he won't say anything about her torn gown and things, and so set your papa thinking about yours, and wanting to see them, perhaps!"

"It is not likely that Colonel Juxon will mention Ella's gown, mamma; it is not as if it was her only one, you know."

"That's true, my dear; I had forgotten. She has only to take another gown out of her wardrobe; and if this Mr. Landon pleases her, and is agreeable, she can take him as easily. Life must be a fine thing to those that are rich—and can enjoy it," added the invalid, in lower tones.

"Dear Ella deserves all she has, mamma," said Gracie, gravely, as if in apology for her friend's prosperity. "She is not spoilt by her riches, but is generous and gracious too."

"I don't deny it, darling," answered her mother, with a little sigh that had nothing of selfishness in it. She thought, maybe, if these things came by deserving, that her Gracie might have had her share of them also.

PRINCE BOLTIKOFF.

A STORY.

THERE are posts more important, perhaps, than Fort Needham on the South Coast, but it is at all times so strictly garrisoned that the integrity of the empire might depend upon its tenure. I was once its

garrison—I, Randal de Louthenberg Caruthers, lieutenant in her Majesty's Royal Regiment of Fencibles—that is to say, I, with a handful of soldiers, held it against all comers. My men were better off than I was, for they took it in turn to mount guard upon the honeycombed ordnance and the tumble-down gates of the fortress. They had employment, I had none. I bathed, breakfasted, and walked upon the shore; to eat, drink, sleep, and smoke made up the sum total of my diversions. But that I was gifted with powers of progression, I might have been an oyster.

One day as usual I strolled upon the beach. The season was spring-time, the sky bright, the sea like a mirror. Nothing ever broke the stillness that reigned around Fort Needham; it lay off the high-road, no one came to it, even the fishing-boats avoided the bay because of the shoal water. With my glass I swept the horizon, now and again examining the sea-gulls or a far-off sail.

What is that black thing bobbing up and down in the water? a hen-coop or a whale? or a new rock shot up suddenly from beneath the waves?

No, it is a boat of some sort; very low in the water, not unlike a raft, and there is a figure on it, a man paddling. He is making for the shore; slowly and surely he approaches. Closer and closer. His face is plainly visible now, and his breast through his open shirt. He handles his little oar with skill and vigour—nearer and nearer he comes. At length—grate, squeeze, thud, his raft has run aground, and he jumps on to the shingle.

The stranger's first act was to throw himself upon his knees and exclaim fervently in French, "Thank God! Safe at last!"

Then he rose and came to greet me with the bow of a finished courtier. He was in rags, he wore only a dilapidated shirt of coarse calico, and a pair of tattered trousers reaching just beyond his knees, made apparently from an old gray blanket; yet, in spite of all, he seemed a gentleman. His manner was perfect, the English in which he addressed me, though tinged with a foreign accent, pure, and in intonation decidedly well-bred.

"This is a sorry plight in which I find myself, monsieur. I am a waif cast up by the sea. I have been shipwrecked. I never dreamt I should reach the land alive!"

"Shipwrecked?" I asked. "When? Where? How?"

"Yesterday I was on board my own yacht, the Feodorowna—I am Prince Boltikoff—you know my name, perhaps?" he said, seeing that I bowed at this introduction of himself. "No? I am a Russian. I was en route for Cowes. Last night the yacht lay becalmed off the Needles, I was in my berth—half reading, half dozing, when—crack!—something crashed into the side of the yacht. I jumped from bed and rushed, as I was, on deck. It was a collision. Death stared us one and all in the face. I snatched up the first garments I could find—you see them," he pointed, smiling, to his rags—"and jumped overboard. I am a good swimmer. At dawn I was still afloat. Then I got together a few floating spars from the wreck, made that little raft—good friend, it has done its duty,"—and as he spoke he pushed it back into the tide—"Adieu; go, mon ami, go."

"May I ask," continued the stranger, as soon as the raft had drifted away, "may I ask where I am? Would you have the extreme complaisance to direct me to the nearest town?"

"This is Fort Needham," I said. "Yarchester is the nearest place—some dozen miles distant."

"So far! I am hardly in walking trim, I fear, but I must make shift to push on."

"Impossible. I cannot permit it. You need rest, food. My quarters are close at hand. I am the commandant of the fort—"

"You are then an English officer I might have guessed it! You are all generous as you are brave. I was with Menschikoff in Sebastopol, and I learnt to respect you then."

"If you are yourself a soldier, prince, it is the more incumbent upon me to be your host."

With this I led the way into the fort. The admission of such a tatterdemalion rather surprised the decorous sentry, but my servant, who was called in to assist at the prince's toilette, soon spread the real story throughout the barracks.

A bath, my razors, and a complete rig-out of my clothes, made a wonderful change in the prince's appearance. He was evidently a person of the highest distinction, not exactly handsome, his smoothly-shaven face was too sallow, and his cheek-bones too high, but he had good features and dark penetrating eyes. He made the mistake also of wearing his hair too short; it was clipped so close that his head looked like a round shot.

"Your clothes fit me to the marvel, mon cher M. Carruthers. It would not be indiscreet to ask your tailor's name? He is an artist."

I was flattered, and replied readily:

"Mr. Schneider will be glad to get an order from you, prince."

"He shall have it. His cut is superb."

Then we sat down to lunch. The prince, although aristocratic to the fingertips, had the most plebeian appetite; within a few minutes he had cleared the table.

"I have not tasted food for twenty-four hours," he said apologetically.

After lunch I produced cigars. He looked at the tobacco ravenously.

"It is my passion. I did not think I could have existed so long without it."

He lay back in an arm-chair and smoked half-a-dozen cigars one after the other, apparently with the most intense gratification. Meanwhile we talked. The prince was a most agreeable companion, his experiences were varied; he had travelled far and wide, had seen many cities, and knew men and manners. It was delightful to listen to him. But he was far too well-bred to monopolise the conversation. He also could listen, and did so with courteous, unflagging interest as I enlarged upon the subjects I had most at heart—he even led me on to talk quite familiarly and freely of my regiment; my comrades; my life and prospects; everything, in short, which interested me.

In this way the hours passed, till suddenly the prince jumped up.

"You have been most good, M. Carruthers. I can never repay your kindness. But now, the day is advancing, I must be moving on."

"Pray do not think of it. You will surely stay and dine? To-morrow or next day will be time enough to travel; by then you will be refreshed and recruited in strength."

"I hardly dare take advantage of your good nature. I know not what to say. But your pleasant society draws me towards you; I will stay. Suffer me only to write a few letters. I must communicate with the Russian Embassy; I should send to my bankers, and to my London hotel for clothes and necessaries."

I sat him down at once to my writing-desk, a piece of portable barrack furniture limited in dimensions, very much littered with old letters, books, and stray papers;

tradesmen's bills, an army list, Bradshaw, officials' reports and returns, some in my own handwriting and bearing my signature. But from among these I cleared sufficient space, and left the prince to write his letters alone.

It was quite an hour before I returned. He started rather as I re-entered the room, but explained that his recent narrow escape had shaken his nerves. He had been busy: several letters were lying on the table, their addresses uppermost, and, for the life of me, I could not help seeing that one was to a secretary of the Russian Embassy, another to someone at Claridge's Hotel, a third to Messrs. Coutts; of a fourth I read only a part. It looked like "Jemmy Haw—Seven Di—" But the moment my somewhat surprised and curious eyes had read thus far, the prince took up all his correspondence, put the letters in his pocket, and rose to greet me with a pleasant smile.

"There! So much for business. This contretemps will alter all my plans. But what matter? I am still alive. Shall we take a breath of air?"

Outside, after a few turns upon the shore, he said:

"Is your post-office far? We might drop these in as we passed."

I said I sent an orderly with the letter-bag as far as Silverburn, the nearest village and railway station: three miles or so. He would start in an hour.

"Now confess—you are sending on purpose? I should be truly grieved to derange you. Your soldier would hate me. What say you; shall we walk to the post ourselves? I should like it, and it would do you good too; you are lazy, mon lieutenant, you will grow fat. Say then, shall we walk to Silverburn?"

I excused myself. The fact was I wished to stay at the fort to attend to household affairs. I did not often entertain a prince, and I was somewhat anxious about the dinner which was being prepared by my inexperienced soldier cook.

"You will not? You are wrong. You should walk more. It is excellent exercise. I find the benefit, and need it much always, as now. But I see you will not be persuaded. Au revoir then—till—?"

"Dinner at half-past six. That will give us a nice long evening."

"Yes; a nice long evening," he repeated after me in a strange mocking tone. If he had not been a prince I might have considered his conduct rude.

We parted. He walked on at a very brisk pace; I returned slowly to the fort.

For the next few hours I was busy superintending the operations in the kitchen, assisting to lay the table, drawing wine, and making ready for the feast. About six P.M. I dressed in mess uniform to do honour to my foreign guest, and walked down the road to meet him on his return.

He had had three hours to do the journey there and back, but half-past six came, and with it no prince. Seven—still he did not appear.

What had happened? He must have lost his way. It was quite dark, and rather cold. At half-past seven I sent off two non-commissioned officers in search of him; at eight I went myself, and, growing more and more concerned, walked on to Silverburn.

Yes; a person answering to the description of the prince had been seen there. He had taken the train to Yarchester. An extraordinary proceeding: still it accounted for his absence, so somewhat relieved I went home, dined by myself, and went to bed.

I slept late next morning. It was close on ten when I was roused by a familiar voice in the outer room.

"What, Randal! Still in bed!"

It was Bob Finch, a brother lieutenant from head-quarters.

"You are to return at once to the regiment," he said. "I have come to relieve you."

"Hurrah!"

"Steady, boy, steady. Read this. Don't sing out too soon."

It was an official letter from the adjutant, desiring me to hand over my detachment, and report myself forthwith at head-quarters—under arrest.

"Bless me! What's up?"

"The colonel's furious. He declares he'll prefer charges, and have you tried by court-martial."

"But why, man? why?"

"What on earth induced you to give that sharper letters of introduction to the regiment? Where, in heaven's name, did you pick him up?"

"The Prince——?"

"Of Darkness. He made nice fools of us all."

I told Bob Finch the story of the raft, at which he laughed a little, adding soon:

"But it's no joke, Randal. He was

asked to mess on the strength of your letter to Greycliffe."

"I gave him none."

"He produced one—on paper with your monogram, and in your writing."

"A forgery."

"But how could he have done it?"

"I left him alone here for an hour or more to write letters. There was one for Messrs Coutts, and another for somebody 'offski,' and one"—for Seven Dials, of course, but I would not confess to this.

"Well, he dined at mess, en bourgeois. He was travelling, and had left his mails at another stage; after dinner he got us to baccarat, which he played to a nicety. We were cleaned out, every one of us. The prince, however, promised us our revenge. Only the same night—it could have been no one else—he broke into the mess-house, stole three dozen silver forks, a heap of teaspoons, several snuff-boxes, one or two racing-cups—in fact, all the light portable articles on which he could lay his hands."

I was utterly ashamed of myself for being so easily imposed upon, and was preparing, in pain and humiliation, to proceed to head-quarters, when my sergeant came in and said two warders had arrived from Talkham Convict Prison; would I see them?

One came in.

"Might I make so bold as to claim your assistance, sir? We have been in pursuit of a convict who escaped from our establishment the day before yesterday."

He produced a large placard headed with the royal arms. Under them, in flaming capitals, were the words:

"Convict just Escaped! Five Pounds Reward!"

Then followed the description.

"Thomas Twoshoes, alias Polish Ned, alias the Swagging Sumph, alias Harry Highflyer; complexion sallow, dark eyes, high cheek-bones, black hair. Speaks with a foreign accent. Was dressed in trousers of patched blanketing and an old check shirt."

"Well, what can I do?" I asked a little nervously. Was I suspected of complicity? Doubtless I had lain myself open to the charge of aiding and abetting in the convict's escape. "If I can assist you in your search——"

"That isn't necessary, sir, for we've caught him."

"Caught him!" cried both Finch and myself in a breath.

"He is outside in the custody of Assistant-warder Tightlock. We captured him seven miles the other side of Yarchester. A boy saw him about daylight hiding behind a hedge changing his shirt—that he had on was marked with the Broad Arrow. We were informed, gave chase, and, after a sharp tussle, took him. Will you allow me to lodge him in your guard-room till the prison-van arrives?"

I consented, and went out with Finch to see the culprit, who was handcuffed and still in my clothes.

"Well, prince," I began.

"Pardon me," he said, gravely, "I am incog.; travelling under the name of Twoshoes. My equerry here, Mr. Tightlock, will explain."

"Always was a rum'un to patter. Flash as you like, and artful," said Mr. Tightlock.

"How he got away was marvellous; like magic," said the senior warder. "He was here to-day—"

"And will be gone again to-morrow," put in the incorrigible rogue. "But, while I have the opportunity, allow me to thank M. Carruthers for his generous hospitality; and perhaps you, sir," he went on to Bob Finch, "will convey to your brother officers an invitation to visit me at Talkham? The place is rough, but I am compelled to make it my residence for the present, and if any care to come over I shall be happy to give them their revenge."

"And the mess plate, Twoshoes?"

"Made into white soup hours ago."

"Melted down that is," remarked Tightlock, by way of explanation.

And that was all we ever heard of it.

THE TWIN PEAKS.

A STORY. IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

I WAS myself more affected by the impression which the perusal of the torn and discoloured fragments of MS. had produced upon my companion, than by the actual words of the unknown writer. The truth is, that being constitutionally sanguine, I had learned to distrust my own tendency to look at the bright side of a project, and it required strong evidence to convince me that I was not a willing dupe to my own hopefulness. Meshech, however, was of a very different mental habit, labouring, in his vocation as a gold-digger, as soberly and steadily as ever did the most painstaking farmer on his fields, and never sacrificing a small cer-

tainty to the possibility of larger but less sure returns.

But now I could see that the Vermonter was deeply moved. The strange way in which this morsel of scorched paper had come into our possession, may have had some influence over his imagination; and, indeed, the notion of being enriched by means so extraordinary was one to commend itself to the fancy. But this was not all. I verily believe that if the fragment of written paper had related to gold, Meshech would have turned a deaf ear to the wiles of the siren. But silver, in such store, and of so pure a quality as the memorandum indicated, was an irresistible lure to the strong-limbed descendant of hardy northern pioneers.

"The poor chap that penned they lines," said Meshech, thoughtfully, as we sat down to our meal—since, after all, men must eat—"has got rubbed out, most like, on his way back from Sacramento to the mines."

"You think, then, that he failed in obtaining the assistance on which he confidently reckoned?" I rejoined, inquiringly, for I had had cause to wonder at my companion's singular sagacity as to the practical matters of life.

"I expect he half failed," answered Meshech, slowly; "borrowed, that is, a handful of hard dollars; picked up, maybe, a mate or two among the loafers, and set off, and come across Wilson's gang, and went under. A bookish, white-fisted man he war, I guess. Gentleman, belike; and wouldn't wager, squire, he warn't from the old country, like yourself. Anyhow, except as to you and me, the secret died with him."

On this last point Meshech was absolutely dogmatic. Whether or not the companions of this unfortunate discoverer had perished along with him, it was unlikely that he should have imparted to them any intelligence, which might enable them to begin an independent search for the hidden treasure. As for the highwayman who had had the book, or part of it, in his possession, his very employment of the precious page as wadding for his pistol proved his reckless ignorance of its contents. By a marvellous chance, the scrap of charred MS. had been preserved for our especial benefit. Meshech, like many miners in all countries, had a tinge of fatalism in his belief, and in this case he yielded readily to the doctrine.

"But," said I, as we thrust aside our empty platters, and filled our pipes, "you

should remember that we possess no certain clue to guide us. There must be, in these half-explored regions, stretching as they do, over thousands of square miles, many peaks and crags among which to choose. The mine itself—for I agree with you that a mine must exist—may be, for aught we know, in Idaho, or Nevada, or in Arizona itself, as easily as in these parts and—

"Ah! but we hev got a clue, squire!" cried Meshech, with an exulting slap of his weigh' right hand upon the rickety table. "'Twar to Stockton the chap made his way, warn't it, after his partner died?' 'Twar at One-Apple Ranch, warn't it, now, his partner did die? This child knows the mountain farm they call so, an' which got its name because the first squatter that settled there, a New Jersey man, kep' on planting pippins, spite of the cold wind and cruel hail, and said he'd be satisfied ef he could but get one of his young apple-trees to thrive on that bleak upland park, whar no tree grows but the pine and birch and juniper. Thet's why it's One-Apple Ranch; an' I'm thinking we can't do better nor track back from thar into the hills, till we find what we're after."

To this reasoning on Meshech's side I could but yield a hearty acquiescence, and in less than a week from the date of the discovery of the pistol-wad, we had turned our backs on Bloody Creek, and were trudging sturdily towards the north, each in heavy marching order, with rifle and ammunition, blankets and haversack, the tools, the tiny tent, and the other weighty portions of our baggage being borne by a pack-mule, which we took in turn to lead. The rout which Meshech had selected led through a barren and thinly-inhabited district, where little food, save fried beans and maize tortillas, could be obtained for money, and where the few white settlers, of Spanish blood and speech, scowled upon us in a way that told of anything but love for the pushing, go-ahead Yankee conqueror.

"Never mind the greasers' sour looks," said Meshech, cheerily; "they hev'n't, among the whole yellow-skinned lot, the manhood to stop a traveller on the high-road. An' the real road-agents stick to the main tracks. Our only risk, hyar, is from Injuns; and the red varmints hev been smartly tamed, and wouldn't venture in on two white men, onless crippled by famine or staggering with fever. They might steal the mule, though. I've known Injuns to dog a party five hundred miles, jest to snap up a horse-beast or so."

Indeed the few poor creatures, of the Ute branch of the wide-spread Shoshonie tribe, who crawled out of their wigwams to beg tobacco and gunpowder, were not of an aspect to alarm the most timorous pilgrim, though, aware of their thievish propensities, we took care to hobble the mule's forefeet together at each halting-place, and more than once discharged our firearms, when the tall grass and bushes near our camp fire rustled under the stealthy passage of wolf or Indian. But the Vermonter's assertion was correct. The stunted savages of that district had been thoroughly "tamed," and were no whit more dangerous than the gipsies on an English common.

"There, Britisher," said Meshech, as he pointed to a low-roofed, straggling congeries of buildings on the highest ridge of a lofty table-land overlooked by yet loftier mountains, "is One-Apple Ranch. Last time I happened into it, it belonged to old Deacon Scott. Guess it's changed hands a few sin' the deacon died."

The upland farm proved to have passed into the possession of an elderly Bavarian farmer, who, with his wife and sons, had been for two years established there, and whose numerous kine were cropping the short sweet grass of the hill pasture. Herr Muller, his sturdy frau, and the flaxen-haired, round-face young men, were as unfavourable specimens of the South-German emigrant as I have ever met with. Except for present payment, they would not extend to us even the hospitality of a disused shed, and affected to understand little or no English; but I was fortunately fluent enough in the German tongue, to frustrate this attempt to get rid of unwelcome questioners. As it was, the replies which I got were boorish and grudging. There had been two strangers, last autumn, at the ranch, and the elder of the two had died, after giving more trouble than he was worth, and lay buried in the swamp where the wild flax grew. The other fellow—Yankee or Englander—was gone, long since, on the way to Stockton, and the Muller family had never seen him again, and had no desire so to do. What manner of men they were—the sick stranger who had drawn his last breath there, and his comrade—the Bavarians professed not to remember. The survivor had said nothing as to his name or residence. He had paid for what the pair had had in rough silver.

"You may rely on it," whispered I to

Meshech, as we took up our quarters in the shed, "that these people are not quite so incurious as they feign to be. Their sullen, almost resentful, manner indicates that they guess our errand, and are provoked that they have not made themselves masters of the secret."

And in fact when, on the next morning, we entered the bleak pass that yawned high above the natural park or pasture in which the ranch stood, one of the young Bavarians from the farm followed us for leagues among the stony ravines and beetling crags, under the pretext of seeking for a strayed calf, and was not shaken off until noon. The mountains we were now traversing were savage and lonely beyond the average of the western wilderness, though here and there we came to broken dams, abandoned workings, and ruined shanties, telling of industry that had long ceased.

"There war a tidy bit of gold washed hyar, years ago," observed the Vermonter, as we passed on. "'Twar all suface dirt, though, and the placers war soon as bare as Broadway."

Up to the close of the second day's march after leaving the ranch, we were in a country the general features of which were known to Meshech, but soon after passing a pine-tree which had been roughly "blazed," or barked, by the surveyor's axe, and on one side of which was painted "Nevada," and on the other "California," to mark the limits of the state and those of the territory, we found the path fork, so that we had to choose whether to follow the route that trended southward, or that which led, according to Meshech's computation, towards the sources of the Buenaventura river. The former of these two tracts, running as it did through grassy meadows and past clumps of timber, was the most attractive.

"Let's take the path to the left," said Meshech, after a brief hesitation; "gold, an' silver, too, are apt to make their nest whar it's ugly, squire."

Nor could anything easily surpass in grimness of aspect the sterile and desolate region into which we now plunged, and where we found it no easy matter to procure even grass enough for the mule, whose ribs and coat began to show tokens of the scanty living to be picked up in those stony ravines. Still we pressed on, passing, now and again, the bleached bones of horses or cattle, the property of earlier explorers of that inhospitable district.

Except the marmots sunning themselves on the rocks overhead, or some solitary vulture perched on the highest pinnacle of a naked cliff, we saw no signs of life. All was bare, barren, and ghastly, and the entire valley seemed to be one in which a wolf would have starved.

Strange to say, Meshech's spirits rose, as we went on plodding through the midst of this joyless landscape, whereas mine, usually buoyant enough, flagged sadly. On what a wild-geese chase, after all, had we entered! The mine might be anywhere—leagues away, perhaps—and situated in some dale or glen quite distinct from the gloomy ravine that we were traversing. The proverbial hunt for a needle in a bottle of hay was not more preposterous than the attempt to identify two particular crags among the many which—Ha! what was that? For, with a gasping cry, like that of a wounded man suddenly stricken by the arrows or bullets of ambushed Indians, Meshech, who had been leading the mule, let go the bridle, staggered, and clutched me by the shoulder to save himself from falling.

"See! see!" said the Vermonter, in smothered accents, as I questioned him as to the cause of his sudden emotion, and, following the direction of his pointing finger, my eyes lit upon a succession of objects which seemed strangely familiar to me. Those two horn-shaped peaks, bright-red in colour, rising boldly above the ragged curtain of gray or variegated rock, where, save in a dream, could I have seen them before? That yawning gully, locally known as a canon or canyon, at the foot of the hill, why did it seem as if I knew its water-worn caves and loose boulders? Could it be—

"The Twin Peaks!" shouted Meshech, snatching a pickaxe from the bundle of tools strapped to the mule's pack-saddle: "Race for it, Britisher; and let's make good our claim before another stirs sod or stone of the mine!"

There was something pathetic, if ludicrous, in the school-boy eagerness with which Meshech and I dashed into the canon, scrambled up the rugged hill-side, and began, with feverish haste, to ply pick and shovel, to slash and hack with our bowie knives amid the brushwood, and to stick wands and slips of wood into the turf and crevices by way of "staking out" our claims. The right of prior occupation, according to law and custom, having been thus secured, we were at leisure to take a

more deliberate survey of our domains. That we had found the mine itself was pretty clear. The indications given in the memorandum were precise; and there, above our heads, soared the double peak, and beneath lay the canon, while a thread of water fell trickling down from a cliff hard by.

It was already late in the afternoon, but by the rays of the sinking sun I espied a glittering scrap of something peeping from amidst the dried grass and withered leaves, and hurrying to the spot, drew forth a jagged fragment of virgin silver, that might have turned the scale at five ounces, the first-fruits of our prize.

"May I never, but they've salted the mine, for a blind, with leaves and dead brush, so as to hide the trail!" shouted the Vermonter, as he tossed aside the withered mosses and the dry twigs, and bathed his hands, as if in water, in the silver lumps and silver scales, the silver sand and knobs of silver ore that lay thickly beneath. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he fell on his knees and clasped his hands.

"Thank God!" he said, "for this—for this, that makes a lady of little sister Ruth, toiling over her weary stitching-work to home in Vermont—for this, that brings the dear old mother to share my home—for this, an' that's the least of the three, that makes a man of Meshech I. Sims. I hope," the brave, simple fellow added, as he rose up, with flushed face and streaming eyes, from his knees, "I hope, squire, you don't think me a silly, now?"

My own heart was beating high, as I remembered Alice, and my own hopes, never so near, as it seemed, to fruition as then. The twilight in those latitudes is but brief, and it grew dark before we could gather up the whole of the hoard of loose silver concealed by the earliest explorers of the mine, and it was not until the pale moon rose, a trembling crescent, over the eastern mountains, that I could cross the canon, and capture the mule which had strayed off in search of provender.

The next three or four weeks were so marked by constant anxiety, sleeplessness, hardships, and toil, that I look back to them now as to the crowded phantasmagoria of a bad dream. The life, even of a successful Californian digger, is not passed on a bed of roses. How the rumour of our wonderful good fortune became noised abroad has always been a standing puzzle to me; but, as vultures wing their way to the carcass of a dead buffalo, so did miners

somehow scent out the rich prize of the Twin Peaks; and, before long, huts, tents, and booths dotted the ravine in such numbers that the place bore some rude resemblance to an English fair.

We had never had the right or the thought to appropriate the entire mine as our own. But a certain liberal portion, comprising the cinnabar veins on the top-most pinnacles, and extending far down the mountain, we had staked out; and this, by "diggers' law" and Congress enactment, was acknowledged to be justly ours. The other portions of the hill-side were eagerly divided among the first comers, and then we found ourselves in presence of an excited and motley throng, ready to buy us out, to jostle us out, to win our claims from us at monte, faro, or poker, or to get rid of us by means of a convenient free fight over any casual dispute at one of the sundry drinking-bars that had been set up, as if by enchantment, in that sequestered valley.

The Twin Peaks Mine, soon to be quoted on the exchanges of America and Europe, did not fall short of the sanguine anticipations of the original discoverers. The yield, even close to the surface, was very large, both as to metallic silver and ore of a fine quality; and after one or two hair-breadth escapes, and much annoyance, Meshech and I were left unmolested in the possession of our claims, with a score of hired labourers, working under our direction in sinking shafts and galleries for the better extraction of the precious ore that lay beneath.

How we toiled, and struggled, and reaped our harvest—how my skill as a civil engineer, in extemporising machinery to be impelled by water-power, and in impressing the mountain torrents to help us in keeping our boring-tools and crushing-mills at work proved useful, may be readily imagined. We eventually sold our rights to a wealthy company of mining speculators; and the Twin Peaks Mine, though thrown into the shade by recent and vaster discoveries, yet figures respectably in the monthly San Francisco circular.

Meshech, with his old mother, were, when last I heard from my former comrade and constant friend, settled in a pleasant villa on the banks of the Hudson, where his sister, who is married to a senator, I believe, spends every summer with them. My own happy home is in England, where, with Alice for my wife, I have long been established, and where Alice's kind mother has learned to forget

the sad days of her Californian exile. But we have surely cause to speak well, personally, of the Far West, since we owe the modest prosperity of our contented lives to the fortunate chance that led to the re-discovery of the Twin Peaks Mine.

INDIAN TEA.

ONLY half a century ago it was commonly believed that the "*Camellia theifera*," or tea-plant, was confined to a belt of land within the Chinese Empire, lying between twenty-five and thirty-three degrees of north latitude. It chanced, however, that in the year 1823 an enterprising Scottish trader, named Robert Bruce, conveyed a cargo of miscellaneous articles up the rivers of Assam to the town of Rungpore, at that time the most important collection of huts in those parts. This Mr. Bruce, being something of a botanist, discovered, to his great surprise, that the lofty trees beneath whose grateful shade he was one day reposing, were of the same genus, and even species, as the lowly tea-producing shrubs of China. Many of these trees exceeded forty feet in height, while not a few attained to sixty feet, though they seldom measured more than a yard in circumference. In answer to his inquiries, he learned that a decoction of tea-leaves had long been a favourite beverage of the Singphos, the tribe inhabiting that district, and that the plant was indigenous to all that portion of Assam which is included between twenty-seven and twenty-eight degrees north. Convinced of the usefulness of his discovery, Mr. Bruce prevailed upon the Singpho chief to enter into an engagement to supply a certain number of plants at a proper period of the ensuing year. In the meantime, however, the first Burmese war broke out, in the course of which, Mr. C. A. Bruce, in command of some gunboats, penetrated as high as Sadiya, where he was shown the agreement made with his brother. On the conclusion of hostilities, Mr. C. A. Bruce conveyed to Calcutta some plants and seed from Upper Assam; and in acknowledgment of his services received a medal from the London Society of Arts. The incident was fruitless of further consequences, but in 1832 Lord William Bentinck's attention was drawn to the similarity of Assam, in soil and climate, to the tea-growing districts of China. Two years later, a committee was appointed to

take into consideration the best means of introducing tea cultivation into the territories of the East India Company. The existence of the indigenous plant was thus once more brought to light, and Mr. C. A. Bruce was selected to superintend the first Government nurseries, while seed, seedlings, and experienced tea-growers and manufacturers, were imported from China. After one or two failures, some samples were produced of such excellent quality, that in 1839 a company was formed in London, under the style of the Assam Tea Company, with a capital of half-a-million, in ten thousand shares of fifty pounds each. To this private association, the Government transferred two-thirds of their plantations—the remaining portion being sold to a Chinaman, in 1849, for something less than one hundred pounds. The first operations of the Assam Tea Company were eminently unsuccessful, being conducted in the most extravagant manner, and without the slightest practical knowledge. It is therefore not very surprising that by 1846-47, the shares, on which twenty pounds had been paid, were practically unsaleable, while a few are said to have changed owners at the nominal price of half-a-crown. This period of depression lasted for several years; but in 1852, a change for the better set in, and since then the company has enjoyed a career of triumphant success. At that date, five or six private gardens had been established at different points, and by 1859 no fewer than fifty-one plantations were being worked by private individuals. Most of these were fairly successful; and up to the year 1863 the prospects of the tea industry were, at least, highly satisfactory. Unfortunately, just then a spirit of wild speculation took possession of the Calcutta community, and bubble succeeded to bubble with dazzling rapidity. "Often in those days," writes an Indian official, "was a small garden made of thirty or forty acres, and sold to a company as one hundred and fifty or two hundred acres. The price paid, moreover, was quite out of proportion to even the supposed area. Two or three lakhs of rupees (twenty or thirty thousand pounds) have often been paid for such gardens, when not more than two years old, and forty per cent. of the existing areas vacancies. The original 'cultivators' retired, and the company carried on." Not unfrequently, the tracts of land disposed of for this

purpose had no existence whatever, or were situated in the wild mountains of the Looshai country, in the midst of unreclaimed savages. At other times a certain extent of accessible land would be obtained, a small portion of which would be cleared and planted with seedlings. Then a company would be formed, with a high interest guaranteed for so many years, the amount of which was, of course, included in the capital. In one instance, at least, "the Indian manager of a promoter of companies in London, was advised by his employer to clear and plant a certain area of waste land, for delivery to a company, to whom he had just sold it as a tea-garden." A year or two afterwards these airy schemes floated away, not without dire loss and ruin to many hundreds of individuals, who, in their over-haste to become rich, had allowed credulity to supplant common sense. With the collapse of the bubble companies a new era was instituted, and from that time the cultivation of the tea-plant has been conducted on the same principles as any other agricultural industry, and with a degree of success which justifies sanguine expectations for the future. The chief difficulty hitherto encountered, and now at last in a fair way to be overcome, has been to obtain a continuous supply of useful labour at reasonable rates. The Assamese themselves will accept work in tea-gardens only when it suits themselves, and for fitful periods of service, deeming it beneath their dignity as landed proprietors—after the manner of French peasants—to bind themselves by regular engagements. It became necessary, therefore, to import labourers from Bengal, and until quite recently the Bengal cooly regarded Assam as a wild and savage land, peopled by cruel and even monstrous inhabitants. And in addition to ideal prejudices, a Hindoo, however destitute he may be, clings to the ancestral village and the rural gods of his forefathers; nor at first could any provision be made for the importation of wives and families. Then, as the earliest immigrants for the most part belonged to the sickly, half-starved, unemployed, redundant population, the sudden change from a scanty to a sufficient diet, together with the dense crowding together on board the river boats, and the inadequate preparations made for their reception on their arrival at their respective plantations, induced a mortality that was really appalling. Happily,

a very different state of things may now be recorded, dating from 1866, the last period of depression in the tea industry. The coolies are now recruited by native foremen, who have had practical experience of tea cultivation, who know the sort of men best adapted for the peculiar kind of work, and who are responsible for the recruits they enlist. As far as is possible, married men are encouraged to take with them their wives and little children, so as to form a home, and revive, as it were, the loved image of the old Bengal village. On the necessarily tedious voyage, advantage is taken of convenient resting-places towards nightfall, where the immigrants can be landed for a brief space to cook their simple food, and take their evening, usually their only, meal in little groups upon the river-bank. At the plantations they find convenient huts, with bits of garden ground, situated on a healthy spot, and arranged like "the lines" of a native regiment. Their wages are considerably higher than they could have earned in Bengal, and their occupation, never excessively fatiguing, lasts all the year round.

So far as the coolies themselves are concerned, the labour question may be said to be at last satisfactorily solved; but on the side of the planters there still remains something to be desired. Among any numerous body of working-men there is always to be found a not inconsiderable percentage of idlers, malingerers, and discontented vagabonds. The coolies employed in Assam are no exception to the rule, and ever and again—generally, of course, at the busiest season—the planter misses a certain number of hands, whose absence entails a serious loss. It is true he can apply for redress to the nearest magistrate, but the remedy is usually worse than the disease. After wasting much valuable time, and undergoing no little annoyance, and even impertinence from the local administrator of the law, who usually evinces the silly old prejudice against "the interloper," the planter may possibly succeed in sending his runaway servant to prison for one month. But, oddly enough, that punishment is held to cancel the previous agreement between master and man; so that, while the one enjoys a holiday, the other forfeits the expenses he has incurred in importing his labourer—from six to eight pounds—and the advances he has had to make to enable the fellow to settle down comfortably. To a cooly

there is no disgrace in being locked up, nor does he find any reason to complain of his lodging, and diet, and freedom from labour. And when the prison door is unlocked, he is at liberty to offer his services to whom he pleases, tolerably certain of a good engagement where labour is still so highly prized. In this direction there is certainly room for improvement, but the Indian Legislature is ever slow to move in rendering effectual encouragement to British capital and enterprise.

The most successful tea plantations are those situated on low, undulating slopes. To ensure a constant and rapid succession of leaves, both heat and moisture are indispensable; but the latter must be derived from running streams, and not from stagnant pools. Above all things is it necessary that the gardens should be above all danger of inundation, for water lodging about the roots turns the leaves yellow, and generally weakens the plant. Of late years greater attention has been paid to the subject of manure, now that the soil is no longer enriched by the decaying vegetation of the primeval forests. Trees, indeed, are still left here and there, for the twofold purpose of shading the seedlings and of retaining moisture in the soil; but the mature plant requires sunshine for the healthy development of its leaves. In the early days of the industry planters were content with three gatherings in the year, of which the first, and best, took place in April, when the young leaf-buds were still covered with a whitish down. The second harvest, so to speak, came off in June, when the leaves were of a dull green hue, and less delicate in flavour; and the third in July, when the leaves were dark green, and altogether coarser. Experience, however, has shown that the tea-plant can put forth eight or nine "flushes" of leaves in the course of the year without being sensibly injured; nor is there any very appreciable difference in the quality of the various pluckings. In Assam, black and green teas are made from the same plant, though the best green implies superior culture, and is also differently prepared. The Chinese seldom allow the shrub to exceed three feet in height, so that it is continually putting forth fresh branches; while the gatherers can squat on the ground and be aided by their children. In India, however, the plant is commonly suffered to grow as high as six and even eight feet,

which compels the pluckers to stand to much of their work, and increases their fatigue. Seedlings will yield a small crop in the third year, but the plant does not attain maturity before the sixth, and will bear for at least forty years if properly managed. The most genial soil is a light porous yellow loam, belonging to the clay-slate formation, fertilised by decaying matter or cattle manure. Since the great extension of tea cultivation, dating from 1866, either indigenous or hybrid seed has been almost exclusively used, though previously the preference seems to have been given to China seed, especially in Cachar, Darjeeling, and the Upper Provinces. "The character of the tea made from these varieties" has been described by a recent writer upon this subject as "rough, pungent, and briak, with a rich, malty flavour; while that from the China plant is much milder in all respects. In Assam these qualities are obtained in the highest degree; in Cachar they are slightly modified; and in Darjeeling, especially on the higher ranges, the pungency and rich malty flavour are somewhat wanting, though compensation may be found in superior aroma and delicacy. The nearer the Indian teas approach the corresponding China varieties, the lower is their market value, while the most esteemed are the kinds which possess in the highest degree the essential attributes of the Assam type. The strong, pungent Assam leaf is at present chiefly employed for mixing with China teas of low quality and price, to enable retail dealers to realise larger profits than they could possibly obtain from unmixed teas." In Ireland, it is said, unadulterated Assam tea is largely sold to the working population, who will tolerate no admixture, though in London it is seldom procurable in retail quantities. No adulteration of any kind is ever practised in India. The genuine article is carefully packed up and despatched to Mincing-lane, where it is disposed of, still untampered with, to wholesale dealers, who pass it on in the same condition to the retail vendors, whose doings are too often shrouded in mystery.

Originally it was found necessary to employ Chinese labourers largely, at every stage from plucking to packing, and they are still valued as superintendents and in the nicer operations, where their delicacy of touch is unrivalled. Of late years, however, machinery has been very generally introduced for rolling and sorting, and

will, no doubt, gradually supplant hand-labour as it becomes more perfected.

The tea cultivation chiefly flourishes in five divisions of the Bengal provinces—Assam (now a chief commissionership), Dacca, Kooch Behar, Chittagong, and Chota Nagpore. Up to the present time about seven hundred and fifty thousand acres of waste land have been secured by individuals or companies interested in this industry, but barely one-tenth portion of that area has yet been actually planted with the tea-shrub. As the average yield of the mature plant is estimated at four hundred pounds per acre, it follows that even the comparatively small area already under cultivation is capable of producing thirty millions of pounds per annum. Indeed, our imports of tea from all parts of India amounted, in 1874, to seventeen millions six hundred thousand pounds; and, in 1875, to twenty-five millions seven hundred and forty thousand pounds; as against one hundred and forty millions six hundred and twenty-eight thousand pounds from China in 1874; and one hundred and sixty-nine millions two hundred and sixty-one thousand pounds in 1875. It may be added, that the deliveries for the first quarter of the present year are at the rate of twenty-eight and a half million pounds per annum. This, however, is but the prelude to an enormous extension of an industry which, in the lapse of years, is probably destined to render England wholly independent of China for the supply of this wholesome beverage. The capital required for a plantation sufficiently large to maintain a family in comfort is computed at about three thousand pounds, as no returns can be expected before the fourth year. Living, however, is cheap enough, if the settler is content to dispense with luxuries. He rears his own mutton and poultry; fish and game are abundant and easily procurable; his neat and commodious bungalow costs little to erect; his clothing is simple and inexpensive; and his occupation for a considerable period of the year light and agreeable. There is not, perhaps, much social intercourse, for his neighbours are few and far apart; but this will improve as fresh lands are taken up, and communication with Calcutta is now both regular and frequent. The greatest drawback is the liability to fever; but as cultivation spreads, the malarious districts will naturally lose much of their virulence, and will gradually be reclaimed.

It must not be supposed that it is only in the lower provinces that the "Camellia theifera" is cultivated as an article of commerce. It flourishes, likewise, in the north-western provinces; and tea grown in the Kangra valley has been imported into Kashgar. The Deyra Dhoon, a beautiful plain or valley enclosed between the Himalayas and the Sewalik range, is eminently well adapted to this delightful and profitable industry, while gardens have been not less successfully established on the lower slopes of eastern Guhrwal and Kumaon. Little of the tea grown in those parts reaches the English markets, being bought up at high prices by the native gentry, who have already acquired a taste for this grateful and harmless stimulant. The opening for adventurers, however, is, upon the whole, less tempting in the north-west than in Assam, Darjeeling, or Cachar, the area being more limited, the expenses far greater, and the market almost local.

PHŒBE: GIRL AND WIFE.

BY PERCY FITZGERALD,

AUTHOR OF "NEVER FORGOTTEN," "THE SECOND MRS. TILLOTSON," &c. &c.

CHAPTER LVII. THE FAMILY MORTIFIED.

It fell out that on the next morning, after breakfast, Mr. Pringle had arranged to take his whole party over to see a great show-place in the neighbourhood belonging to a great lord, whom they knew in a sort of debatable way—that is, by great pressure and exertion, they had contrived an introduction at some party, which was the whole of the acquaintance. To say the truth, they were not at all eager for the expedition, feeling uneasy as to what it might bring forth; but there had been such an assumption of intimate acquaintance: "Of course, you are always running over to Gules Hall?" "I suppose you find the Guleses capital neighbours?"—that the Pringles had only to reply with vague simperings of assent.

It was Lord Garterley who called out decidedly, "Oh, you must make a day of it to go to Gules." And, in sheer desperation, Mrs. Pringle had sent a man and horse with a humble and respectful letter, hoping that she might be allowed to bring a party of friends who were staying with them, and who were most anxious to see the Hall, on the next day.

A reply came from Lord Gules himself, in the manner of the late Duke of Wel-

lington, in which it was politely stated that the following day was the public show-day, when the Castle was open to all comers, and that there was no need to ask permission. This struck a chill to Mrs. Pringle's heart. Still, she comforted herself by the reflection that Lord Gules had simply stated the fact; and she could not resist the pleasure of saying, carelessly:

"I have just had a note from Lord Gules. Unfortunately, it seems to-morrow is the public day; but you won't mind that?"

Accordingly, they started in three carriages, and went over the revered old pile.

"It's nearly thirty years—would you believe it?—since I have been here," said Lord Garterley, as they were passing through the Hall.

"What! then you know Lord Gules?" faltered Mrs. Pringle.

"Lord bless you, well! You'd better go in and see Lady Gules. She's in the drawing-room——"

"I?" said Mrs. Pringle, shrinking and dreadfully confused.

"I suppose she'll offer the party lunch? I'll beat her up. Where's his lordship?" he asked of one of the servants. "Tell him Lord Garterley is here."

The ladies gathered round Mrs. Pringle, but the ponies remained a pitiable specimen of fear and irresolution.

"I hardly know her well enough," she began.

"Why, I thought you said you were intimate?" he answered with some impatience. "Here! I'll settle it." And Lord Garterley, advancing gaily, tapped at the drawing-room door, entered, and shut it, and from the loud laughter and hilarity the party without could see that he was well received.

Lady Gules presently came out.

"Which is Mrs. Pringle?" she said. That lady was standing before her, a monument of hesitation and undignified confusion. "Oh, won't you come in and sit down? Pray do. Any friend of Lord Garterley's, I am sure—pray, come in! All your friends also!"

And thus a sort of herd made its way in, Mrs. Pringle being last among the rest. Lady Gules was most gracious and empressée in her manner, collectively, as it were. But old Sam, cowed at first, was now indignant at their undignified position, and at the buck, so he phrased it, which his wife had run upon them all;

and he now, with his usual prancings, made his advances to the lady of the house.

"A lovely place, indeed, madam, and with a divinity as elegant to preside over it. These are your lovely daughters, I presume, ma'am?"

The reply was a look of astonishment and a cold inclination.

"We have a poor little shanty of our own, not far from this," continued Sam, not at all abashed. "We must get your ladyship over there, and will take all care of you."

The lady had that rather common reputation, in the aristocracy—of being "the proudest woman in England," and again merely gave an inclination of a smilingly haughty kind. Lord Garterley was the person whom she honoured through the whole ceremony. The Pringle family had to talk to each other. As they were going away, Mrs. Pringle, in her favourite sweetly-smiling, hesitating manner, began to murmur:

"We have a number of friends staying with us—Lord Rotherhithe, Lord Garterley, and others, and if—er—you would not mind——"

The proudest lady in England smiled her off with her favourite inclination of her head—a most curious language, which she kept for such people. It was gracious, and at the same time seemed to push Mrs. Pringle away. That lady felt embarrassed, and dared not press for a more explicit answer.

When they were driving home, Lord Garterley said, in a blunt way:

"I thought you was intimate with the Guleses. Otherwise we ought not to have invaded them with such a large party."

During their absence a curious little episode was going forward. Mr. Brookfield did not care to be of the party, and had remained at home, as had the young lord, who considered such an expedition mere "rot," as he put it. The former gentleman had letters to write, and, though not using the young nobleman's unrefined phrase, held the same view. There was a good deal in the place to see and enjoy—there were rabbits to be shot—the young lord was an amusing fellow enough, and his views of society, as taken from his own special point, were new to Mr. Brookfield. He had gone to his room to "rig himself out," as he put it, and Mr. Brookfield was going towards the hall, when he was attracted by a sort of dis-

cussion that was going on between the servant and some visitor.

"Well, then, I'll wait. I shan't go away. You have no right to prevent me coming. Let me see someone."

"Very sorry, sir," the man was answering—with that respectful imperturbability of the menial for which they receive great credit, but is more nearly allied to dulness than is supposed—"but I can't admit you."

"I tell you I am Mr. Pringle's son."

"Very likely, sir. But the family is all out."

Mr. Pringle's son! This was strange indeed. Mr. Brookfield at once came forward, naturally feeling curiosity as to the appearance of this oppressor of the heroine of his little adventure. He took his measure at once—petulance, folly, instability, fickleness, sulkiness—there was, besides, about his dress a certain air of decay and shabbiness.

"The family are away," said Mr. Brookfield. "You had better return later, if you still wish to see them."

"This is my father's house," said the other excitedly; "and you see that I am refused admittance."

Mr. Brookfield shrugged his shoulders. Then, adroitly offering a sort of *juste milieu*, put on his hat and walked out on the lawn. The young man was as clay in the hands of that well-trained person. Mr. Brookfield appeared to listen to his story of grievances, while he, in reality, made the young man tell all he desired to know. Presently appeared Lord Rotherhithe, who joined the pair, and having been told the quality of the new arrival, declared it was "deuced odd," and seemed much taken aback at the discovery of the condition of this person.

After a short stay Mr. Pringle, who was sadly changed, and had become a grievance-monger, returned to his inn, declaring that he would come back in the morning and "make a row." That evening Mr. Brookfield had a long conversation with Mr. Pringle. There was an odd change noticed in the behaviour of the young lord that night. He was gloomy, "short" in manner, and distant all the night; remained long at billiards; and clearly had something on his mind. His appointed lady-love was much bewildered by this behaviour.

Mrs. Pringle was greatly disturbed and put out at noting these symptoms, the more so as she could not account for them. She had, after all, the feelings of a mother, and when she heard that her son

was almost at the very gate of her home, an outcast and in sore distress, she became at first a little agitated. But then followed the reflection how awkward and inconvenient it was; especially if any of the guests should meet him! A pauper, out-at-elbows son, with a grievance, would be too discreditable; and if it got abroad! She was much put out, especially when Mr. Brookfield announced the intentions of the young man, and his proposed visit on the following day.

"Something should be done at once," said Mr. Brookfield; "forgive me if I speak plainly, but these family difficulties are looked on as an affront by the public, or rather by society, which desires that we should have a laundry at home for washing this sort of linen. If you cannot be reconciled, why not let them have a small allowance and save yourself this host of inconveniences?"

"I quite agree with you, and I am for it, and have said so all through. It is unchristian, and, as you say, inconvenient. But you know what Mr. Pringle is, and how impossible it is to get him to see things properly. On this point he seems to be really mad—talks of letting them starve and all that."

"What does Miss Lacroix say?"

"Do you know she puzzles me. I sometimes think that she seems to influence Mr. Pringle in this view, though she counsels him. But really without her I could not keep Mr. Pringle in any order. He would disgrace us before all our friends."

"Well, I can supply you with an additional motive for an accommodation. Lord Rotherhithe unfortunately met your son to-day, and you can see he is not a little changed, either by what he has heard or by what he suspects. I would certainly do something, and do it at once."

She thought she would speak to Sam; but the incurable old jester was at that moment giving a representation of the *cachucha*, as he had seen it danced by the charming Duvernay. "She had the loveliest-formed limbs you ever saw, and the way she leaped and glided would have done a bishop's heart good. See here, my honey-bird," he said to Miss Lacroix, "you stand thus. There was a twirling Frenchman, called Petty, that used to dance with her, and was like a gate-post for her to lean against, while she pattered round on her pootty little toetums." And old Sam began to walk round Miss Lacroix in the

style he described, causing inextinguishable laughter.

Lord Rotherhithe alone looked on gloomily.

Old Sam, who was selfish enough even to sacrifice the interests of his family to his own humours, was a little nettled at this gravity; for the young lord was regarding this "clowning" with a sort of stolid gravity that seemed akin to disgust.

"You don't seem to enjoy the little show?" said Sam, in a tart style. "What's the matter, my juvenile member of the Upper House?"

"It's a curious performance; but I've seen better," said the young man, turning away.

The ponies gave an imploring look; but it was of no avail. As soon as Miss Lacroix was released, Mr. Brookfield was beside her.

"Do you know," he said, "I am a little surprised that you encourage the exuberancies of our host, especially as I believe you have some influence with him."

"You seem always ready to judge me harshly," she said. "I would not behave so to you. But I have some little influence with him; he must be indulged sometimes, or he would be intolerable."

"Then why not exert it," he said, abruptly, "and reconcile him to his son and daughter?"

She turned away impatiently.

"Why not leave out the son? You are not much interested in him. Give things their right names. Well, you want me to do—what?"

"The young man was here to-day."

She started.

"Yes. I saw him—talked with him. There will be a scandal here; his mother is willing to come to some terms. As you say you have influence with the person they call old Sam, you can do the rest. You will save this unfortunate young husband from misery; for I can see that he has found a way of forgetting his troubles."

"So you have arranged my part in this affair?" said she, coldly. "You wish me to exert myself for your protégée? What if I decline the character for which you have cast me? Have you forgotten our conversation of last night?"

"Not a word of it; but what part do you refer to?"

"You require to be reminded, I see; it was too unimportant for you to recollect, because it concerned me. I told you that I was not called upon to imperil my own position; I am content to accept events as they come, but not to turn them against myself."

"That is a delusion, and the fiction does not blind me. The conclusion I have formed—forgive me being so brusque—is this: you must have some secret animosity to this poor child."

"Poor child!" repeated the other, with scorn.

"Yes, such she is; and you are afraid that her presence here may interfere with your views as to some one in whom you are interested. I acquit you of so vulgar a passion as revenge or vindictiveness. See, you are colouring! Very well," he added, turning away, "since such is your programme, here is mine. By to-morrow we shall have brought about this reconciliation, and the young man will be in the bosom of his family. There, Miss Lacroix! And a day or two later I hope to see this poor, injured, little wife enjoying her proper place here!"

Miss Lacroix said nothing.

"Now, mind," he said, almost sternly, "your own declaration—no opposition—or, at least, only passiveness——"

"I declare nothing," she answered. "I reserve all my own power of acting in any way I choose." Then, suddenly, "What have I done during our short acquaintance to make you dislike me so?"

"So speaks one school-girl to another," he answered, laughing. "There are few persons one takes the trouble to dislike."

END OF THE SIXTEENTH VOLUME.

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